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PSC 444.01: Political Participation in America

Christopher P. Muste

University of Montana - Missoula, christopher.muste@umontana.edu

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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN AMERICA - PSC 444

Fall 2007

MWF 12:10 – 1:00, 308 Liberal Arts

Professor Christopher Muste

Office: 416 Liberal Arts

Office Hours: Monday 4-5, Wednesday 4-6, and by appointment

Political Science Department - 350 Liberal Arts; phone 243-5202

e-mail: christopher.muste@umontana.edu

Phone: 243-4829

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines the ways people participate (or don't) in the American political system. Political participation is crucial in any democracy, providing a linkage between leaders and the public. We will examine the individual-level factors that influence how much and what kinds of political activities people participate in, how people make decisions about political participation, and the system-level policies and institutions that inhibit, encourage, and channel individuals' participation. While we focus on voting as the primary political act in a representative political system, we will also explore several other forms of participation. Political participation is one of the most studied topics in political science, so we will only scratch the surface of a rich body of research. But by exploring some of this research we will gain a better understanding of the political system and how it operates, and also learn how to become more politically engaged and effective ourselves.

The course will be divided into three sections. In the first section we will focus on who votes and who doesn't, one of the most fundamental political acts a citizen can engage in. In the second section we will explore how people decide who and what to vote for in a variety of electoral contexts, focusing on the 2004 presidential election and the 2006 congressional elections. In the third section we will examine forms of participation beyond voting, such as contacting government officials and the news media, campaigning in elections, contributing money, participating in interest groups, engaging in protest and grassroots movements, deliberating about policy, and other less visible but nonetheless important forms of political participation. Throughout the course we will examine theories and concepts about political participation in a democratic society, as well as the empirical evidence used by social scientists to evaluate those theories and concepts. By the end of the course students should understand the theories and concepts, understand how evidence relates to those theories, and learn to apply the theories and concepts to their own political participation.

To enhance your understanding and experience of participation, there will be a research paper that will involve engaging in and analyzing one or more forms of participation, or observing and analyzing others' participation in political activities. Details on the paper will be provided later in the semester, but the goal of the paper in part is to enhance awareness of our own capacity for participation, our potential impact on politics, and how the experience of participation provides insight into the American political system.

READINGS:

There will be two books for this course, available at the University Bookstore by mid-September.

The two books definitely to be used are:

Green, Donald P., and Alan S. Gerber, *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*. Brookings Institution Press, 2004. ISBN: 0815732694

Abramson, Paul. R., et al. *Change and Continuity in the 2004 & 2006 Elections*. CQ Press, 2007. ISBN: 0-87289-415-0

The other readings for the course will be available on Reserve in both electronic (ERES) and traditional (paper) format at the Mansfield Library, and are listed in the "Course Topics and Readings" section below.

The ERES password for this course is

GRADES AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Some of the reading material on participation is complex or technical, and the reading load is generally heavy. Keeping up with the reading, daily attendance, and participation in discussion are therefore essential. The class lectures and discussions will cover material not in the course readings, and all material may be on the exams. To participate effectively in discussion and do well in the course, you will need to keep up with the assigned readings. To encourage you to do so, there will be several days during the semester when I give pop quizzes about the readings. These pop readings quizzes cannot be made up, so it benefits you to attend class regularly and keep up with the readings. They will be worth a total of 5% of the course grade. Participating frequently and intelligently in class discussions is an important part of learning, so discussion participation is worth an additional 5% of the course grade. One of the most important forms of class participation is asking questions, so when the readings, lectures, or discussions seem baffling, unclear, or interesting, ask questions about them!

There will be two exams: a midterm and a final. The final will be comprehensive but weighted toward the material in the second half of the course. Both exams will have material from both lectures and readings.

The research paper will be 8-10 pages in length. It will give you an opportunity to do an original research project focusing on one or more aspects of political participation, and will involve you engaging in political activity or observing others' political participation. The specific paper options and requirements will be provided later in the semester.

GRADES will be assigned according to the following percentages:

A = 93-100	B+ = 87-89.9	C+ = 77-79.9	D+ = 67-69.9	below 60=F
A- = 90-92.9	B = 83-86.9	C = 73-76.9	D = 63-66.9	
	B- = 80-82.9	C- = 70-72.9	D- = 60-62.9	

Reading quizzes	5% of grade
Participation	5% of grade
Midterm exam	30% of grade
Research paper (8-10 pages)	25% of grade
Final exam	35% of grade

THE NEWS

Students should be regular and critically aware consumers of media coverage relating to participation, which means you should follow the news coverage in a major newspaper on a daily basis. The *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are two of the best in news coverage and have free websites. The *Wall Street Journal* has less political news but its news coverage is also very good. It is only available free on Factiva, through the Mansfield Library website. All three papers and many others are available daily (several days delayed) at the Mansfield Library. Other sources of news can provide a useful contrast with and supplement to newspaper reading, although many, for example CNN and FoxNews provide only superficial coverage of political news.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University.

All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at <http://ordway.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/name/StudentConductCode>

The University of Montana Student Conduct Code prohibits plagiarism, which is "representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own." This is a serious academic violation that can result in penalties up to suspension or expulsion from the University. **I take academic honesty very seriously, and will do my utmost to prevent, uncover, and penalize any form of cheating in this course.** See the "Plagiarism Warning" on pp. 23-24 in the *University of Montana 2007-2008 Catalog*, and the Student Conduct Code on the UM website listed above. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about academic honesty.

GRADUATE STUDENTS:

Graduate students must complete additional graduate-level readings for each course topic as specified by the instructor, and must complete a 20-25 page research paper consisting of a research design and hypothesis, original participant-observation experience, extensive literature review, and an analysis that synthesizes the three components

CLASS COURTESY:

In order to have a pleasant and effective learning environment in a class this size, we need to observe a few basic courtesies. This is a small campus, so it is possible to get to the classroom on time from all other campus buildings; arriving late or leaving early disrupts the class and disturbs other students and the instructor. Please turn off all cell phones before class begins. Please don't read a newspaper or other non-course material, eat during class, or use text messaging, web browsers, or similar communications. If you have a question or comment about the material, please raise your hand instead of discussing it with your neighbor. We'll all benefit if we just keep in mind the reason we're in the room together.

DROP POLICY AND INCOMPLETES:

You can drop on Cyberbear until September 18, and from then until October 9 using a drop slip signed by me. After October 9, you must go through the more formal and difficult "late drop" petition process. I will sign late drop petitions for only one week after the first exam grades are posted, and after that only under extraordinary circumstances, as outlined on p. 19 of the *UM 2006-2007 Catalog*.

Incompletes will only be permitted when all the conditions set forth in the official University policy are met – the policy is on pp. 20-21 of the *University of Montana 2006-2007 Catalog*.

DSS STUDENTS:

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodation in this course. Students with disabilities requesting accommodation on exams, papers, or other course requirements should contact me as soon as possible, and must contact DSS in order to arrange for and provide me with a letter of approval for accommodations. DSS is in Lommasson Center 154.

E-MAIL AND BLACKBOARD:

In order to do some of the assignments for the course, for communication and course resources, and to access your grades and other course information, you will need to sign into the Blackboard website that has been created for this course. Information on how to access your account is at: <http://www.umt.edu/ce/umonline/students/welcome.htm>

Blackboard also uses your official UM e-mail account to send my e-mails to the class, so you should check it frequently. If you use another e-mail account, go into CyberBear to have your official UM e-mail forwarded to your preferred e-mail account, and check that account frequently.

COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

August 27 & September 5 & 7 Introduction: Political Participation and Democracy

Gene Weingarten, "None of the Above", *The Washington Post*, 10/31/04.

Carole Pateman, from *Participation and Democratic Theory*, pp. 1-5, 22-34.

August 29 & 31, Weds. & Fri. NO CLASS DUE TO CONFERENCE

September 5, Monday NO CLASS TODAY DUE TO LABOR DAY HOLIDAY

September 10 - 12 The Basics of Electoral Participation: Who Votes? Who Doesn't? What's the Problem?

Review Pateman reading

Teixeira, Introduction and Chapter 1

McDonald, Michael P. "Every Eligible Vote Counts," *Brookings Institution*.

September 14-21 Turnout Decline: Why the Decline? Who's not voting?

Teixeira, Chapter 2 "Why is American Voter Turnout Going Down?"

and Chapter 3, "A Class Bias in American Politics?"

Abramson, et al., Chapter 4, pp. 79-106

September 24-28 Turnout: Parties, Media, and Campaigns

Patterson, Chapter 4, "The Long Campaign"

Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Shanto Iyengar. 1995. "The Withdrawal of the Voter," Chapter 5 in *Going Negative*, pp. 99-114.

October 1-5 Possible Remedies: Utopian Elections and 2004

Patterson, Chapter 6, "A Model Campaign"

Teixeira, Chapter 5, "Conclusion: The Problem of Voter Motivation."

Abramson, et. al., Chapter 4, review pp. 100-106 only

McDonald, "Up, Up and Away! Voter Participation in the 2004 Presidential Election," in *The Forum*, v2(4), 2004.

October 8 & 10 Mobilizing Voters: What Works?

Green and Gerber, *Get Out the Vote* (entire book)

OCTOBER 12, FRIDAY: MIDTERM EXAM (TENTATIVE DATE)

October 15 & 17 Election 2004: How It All Played Out

Abramson, et al., Part I and Chapters 1-3

October 19 - 24 Election 2004: What Influenced Voters' Decisions?

Abramson, et al., Chapters 5-8

Oct. 26 & 29 Congressional Elections in 2004 and 2006 - A Sea Change?

Abramson, et al., Chapters 9-12.

Oct. 31 & Nov. 2 Information and Emotion in Voting Decisions

Lupia, "Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections" *APSR* 1994 (68), pp. 63-76.

Rahn, "Affect as Information: The Role of Public Mood in Political Reasoning," pp 130-150 in *Elements of Reason*.

Just, et al., "Discourse and Decision" pp. 233-244 in *Crosstalk*.

Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Shanto Iyengar. 1995. "Striking a Responsive Chord," Chapter 4 in *Going Negative*, pp. 63-98.

November 5 - 10 Beyond Voting: Other Forms of Participation

Rosenstone and Hansen, "Participation in American Politics, 1952-1990," and "Participation in Governmental Politics," chapters 3 and 4 in *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*.

NOVEMBER 12, FRIDAY NO CLASS - VETERANS' DAY HOLIDAY

November 14 & 16 Non-electoral Participation: Social Capital and Bowling

Putnam, Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital In America" *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 1995, pp 664-683.

Putnam, Chapter 15, "What Killed Civic Engagement? Summing Up" in *Bowling Alone*, pp. 277-284.

Schlozman, et al. "Civic Participation and the Equality Problem" chapter 12 in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, pp 427-461.

November 19 Interest Groups and Grassroots Activism

Berry, "The Rise of Citizen Groups," chapter 10 in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, pp 367-394.

Teske, "Activism in Political Science," Chapter 1 in *Political Activists in America*.

November 21 & 23, WEDNESDAY & FRIDAY NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING

November 26 - 30 Unconventional Participation: Protest

Dalton, Russell J. "Protest Politics" in *Citizen Politics*, pp. 67-85.

Wolfsfeld, Gadi. "Media, Protest, and Political Violence" in *Media Power in Politics*, pp. 263-275.

RESEARCH PAPER: DUE MONDAY, DECEMBER 4 IN CLASS.

December 3-7 Good News?

Putnam, "Against the Tide," Chapter 9 in *Bowling Alone*, pp. 148-180.

Putnam, "Bowling Together; The United State of America," in *The American Prospect* 2/11/02.

Dalton, Russell J. 2007. Reading from *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics*

FINAL EXAM: WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 8:00 – 10:00 AM